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**The Roles of Music in Improving the Behaviour and Academic Performance of Children  
with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties**

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**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was to examine the roles of music in improving the behaviour and academic performance of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Music is a vocal or instrumental sounds combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion. There have been many statements regarding to the roles of music on behaviour and academic performance of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Music is a very powerful medium and there have been attempts to control its use. It is powerful at the level of the social group because it facilitates communication which goes beyond words, enables meanings to be shared, and promotes the development and maintenance of individual, group, cultural and national identities. Music is powerful at the individual level because it can induce multiple responses – physiological, movement, mood, emotional, cognitive and behavioral. The study concluded that music seems to improve academic performance of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Music education has been decimated in schools around the globe, due to competition with academic performance and increasing lack of funding. Throughout the history, music has played a significant role in human life. It has been used to express and influence human thoughts, emotions and behavior in varied forms. Music has been used as a tool in treating human problems and bringing significant changes to human behavior and academic performances. One of the recommendations made was that school administrators should improve the standard of music in the school for the children to achieve their academic performance.*

**KEYWORDS: Music, Behaviour, Academic Performance, Children, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties**

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**Introduction**

Music is an art form and cultural activity whose medium is sound organized in time. The common elements of music are pitch (which governs melody and harmony), rhythm (and its associated concepts tempo, meter, and articulation), dynamics (loudness and softness), and the sonic qualities of timbre and texture (which are sometimes termed the “color” of a musical sound). Different styles or types of music may emphasize, de-emphasize, or omit some of these elements (Douglas, & Auchterderran, 2004). Music is performed with a vast range of instruments and vocal techniques ranging from singing to rapping; there are solely instrumental pieces, solely vocal pieces (such as songs without instrumental accompaniment), and pieces that combine

singing and instrument. Music performs this role by stimulating not only the brain and blood flow, but also the mind, body, senses, and all the other human faculties. Music also reduces anxiety, high blood pressure, and pain, improves sleep, and enhances moods, motivation, mental alertness, and memory. As such, it is an ideal activity for seniors and people suffering from many different types of illnesses and diseases and not just children, teenagers, and adults generally (Schafer, 2018). Music can play an important part in human development in the early years stimulating fetuses and infants in such a way as to promote their wellbeing. Early interactions between mother and child have an essentially musical quality which assists in the development of communication skills.

Music has some powerful roles on the behaviour and academic performance of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A quiet, gentle lullaby can soothe a fussy baby, and a majestic chorus can make us swell with excitement. But music also can affect the way we think (University of Georgia 2020). Children who grow up listening to music develop strong music-related connections. Some of these music pathways actually affect the way we think. Listening to classical music seems to improve our spatial reasoning, at least for a short time. Music participation provides a unique opportunity for literacy preparation. Whether the children are singing, playing, or listening, teachers direct them to listen and hear in new ways which exercises their aural discrimination. Listening to music or being involved in making it does not seem to directly affect intelligence, although active involvement in music making may enhance self-esteem and promote the development of a range of social and transferable skills (WordPress 2018). Listening to quiet, relaxing background music can improve performance on a range of academic tasks, while exciting music may interfere.

### **Concept of music**

Music refers to the tones or sounds employed, occurring in single line (melody) or multiple lines (harmony), and sounded or to be sounded by one or more voices or instruments, or both. Music is an art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and color (Dictionary.com 2021). Music refers to the vocal, instrumental or mechanical sounds having rhythm, melody, or harmony. It is also the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity (MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2020). Music is a series of sounds made by instruments or voices in a way that is pleasant or exciting. Music is a vocal or instrumental sound combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion (Lexico.com 2021). Music is the art or science of composing or performing music and a sound perceived as pleasingly harmonious. According to Przybyłek, & Blakeley, (2020), music is a collection of coordinated sound or sounds. Making music is the process of putting sounds and tones in an order, often combining them to create a unified composition. People who make music creatively organize sounds for a desired result. Music is made of sounds, vibrations, and silent moments, and it doesn't always have to be pleasant or pretty. It can be used to convey a whole range of experiences, environments, and emotions. Music is the pattern of sounds produced by people singing or playing instruments.

Music is the art of arranging sounds in time to produce a composition through the elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre (The American Heritage Dictionary Entry 2021). It is one of the universal cultural aspects of all human societies. General definitions of music include common elements such as pitch (which governs melody and harmony), rhythm (and its

associated concepts tempo, meter, and articulation), dynamics (loudness and softness), and the sonic qualities of timbre and texture (which are sometimes termed the "color" of a musical sound). Different styles or types of music may emphasize, de-emphasize or omit some of these elements. Music is performed with a vast range of instruments and vocal techniques ranging from singing to rapping; there are solely instrumental pieces, solely vocal pieces (such as songs without instrumental accompaniment) and pieces that combine singing and instruments (Liddell, & Scott, 2015). Music is an arrangement of sounds having melody, rhythm, and usually harmony classical music. According to MERRIAM-WEBSTER (2020) stated that music is the art of producing pleasing or expressive combinations of tones especially with melody, rhythm, and usually harmony

### **Concept of behaviour problems of children**

Behaviour problems of children refers to the symptomatic expression of emotional or interpersonal maladjustment especially in children (as by nail-biting, enuresis, negativism, or by overt hostile or antisocial acts). It's also an individual evidencing maladjustment by indulging in behaviour problems especially: a child indulging in such problems (MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2021). Behaviour problems of children is an unwanted behaviour which needs changing. Also, a pattern of hostile, aggressive, or disruptive behaviour which goes beyond societal norms. Although it does not serve to seriously impair individual function, it can be a problem area (Pam M, 2013). Behaviour Problems are a common behaviour problem among children. Behavior problems are those that aren't considered typically acceptable. Nearly everyone can have a moment of disruptive behaviour or an error in judgment. However, problem behaviour is a consistent pattern. Problem behaviours can vary in terms of severity. They can occur in children as well as in adults. People with problem behaviours often require medical intervention to improve their symptoms. According to Levy (2020), behaviour problems in children often show themselves in different ways among girls and boys. For example, boys with problem behaviour may fight, steal, or deface property. Girls with problem behaviour may lie or run away from home. Both are at greater risk for drug and alcohol abuse.

Behavioural problems don't have the exact definition, they are behaviours that contradict to specific age, culture, social values and norms. According to Achenbach, & Edelbrock, (2009), behavioural problems can be categorized into Internalizing and Externalizing. Behavioural problem may manifest alarmingly and abruptly as a single incident (eg, setting a fire, fighting at school). More often, problems manifest gradually, and identification involves gathering information over time. Behavior is best assessed in the context of the child's (Sulkes, 2019). Many behavioural problem exhibited by children or adolescents concern parents or other adults. Behaviours or behavioural patterns become clinically significant if they are frequent or persistent and maladaptive (eg, interfere with emotional maturation or social and cognitive functioning). Severe behavioural problems may be classified as mental disorders (eg, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder). Prevalence rates vary according to how behavioural problems in children are defined and measured. Diagnosis of behavioural problems in children consists of a multistep behavioural assessment. Concerns with infants and young children often involve bodily functions (eg, eating, eliminating, sleeping), whereas in older children and adolescent's interpersonal behavioural concerns (eg, activity level, disobedience, aggression) predominate.

### **Concept of emotional difficulties of children**

Emotional difficulties are type of special educational needs in which children/young people have severe difficulties in managing their emotions and behaviour. They often show inappropriate responses and feelings to situations (Southampton City Council 2018). This means that they have trouble in building and maintaining relationships with peers and adults; they can also struggle to engage with learning and to cope in mainstream education. Children with emotional difficulties will often feel anxious, scared and misunderstood. According to ROBINSON (2020), Emotions bring purpose, pleasure and meaning to our lives. However, for many people, they are synonymous with distress, pain and suffering. Anger and rage can wreck relationships and cause problems at work; anxiety can prevent us from socialising or engaging in things we would like to; sadness can feel overwhelming and never-ending. Some people struggle experiencing too much emotion, whilst others can feel cut off from experiencing a broad and healthy range of emotions that help them navigate life's challenges. These types of difficulties are often referred to as emotion regulation problems and can prevent us from developing stable and happy relationships, communicating our needs, and flourishing. Care Tech Community Services (2020) stated that emotional difficulties in children are describes as a range of complex difficulties. Children and young people with emotional difficulties may be withdrawn or isolated from their family or peers, become hyperactive and lack concentration, present disruptive and disturbing behaviour, might be socially immature, or display challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs. The behaviour of a young person with emotional difficulties can often challenge parents, teachers and care takers outside appropriate, 'normal' social boundaries. As such, a child may find forming relationships with peers and authority figures difficult and will often face barriers in their social and educational development.

Emotional Disorder (often referred to as Emotional Difficulties) and refers to a condition in which behaviour or emotional responses of an individual are so different from generally accepted norms, that they adversely affect that child's performance. The term emotional difficulties are a broad term often used to group a range of more specific difficulties such as behaviour which interferes with a child's own learning or the learning of their peers (Douglas Silas Solicitors 2005). Emotional difficulties are generally a specific diagnosis where the child displays persistent and severe behaviours. It can also be referred to as Social, Emotional and Behavioural difficulties. Due to the potential emotional difficulties or disturbance, children with emotional difficulties may refuse or unsuccessfully be able to utilize educational opportunities offered to them and are therefore potentially difficult or challenging to manage. Often due to the fact that the child's brain receives and processes information differently than a child who does not suffer from emotional difficulties. According to HEALTHGRADES (2021), Emotional difficulties include anger, anxiety, disgust, excitement, fear, happiness, joy and sadness, to name a few. Emotional symptoms can be positive or negative and can come from within you or be a reaction to your environment. Emotional changes can be normal, temporary responses to events; however, disproportionate, extreme, persistent or unstable emotional reactions may indicate an underlying disorder.

### **Concept of Academic Performance**

Academic performance is the measurement of student achievement across various academic subjects. Teachers and education officials typically measure achievement using classroom performance, graduation rates and results from standardized tests (BALLOTPEDIA 2020). Academic performance is the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has attained their

short or long-term educational goals. Completion of educational benchmarks such as secondary school diplomas and bachelor's degrees represent academic achievement (Wikipedia 2021). Martínez-Otero, (2007) states that academic performance is the product given by the students and it is usually expressed through school grades. Caballero, Abello, & Palacio, (2007), academic performance involves meeting goals, achievements and objectives set in the program or course that a student attends. These are expressed through grades which are the result of an assessment that involves passing or not certain tests, subjects or courses. Torres and Rodríguez (2006 quoted by Willcox, 2011) define academic performance as the level of knowledge shown in an area or subject compared to the norm, and it is generally measured using the grade point average. According to Ward, Stoker, & Murray-Ward, (2006), academic achievement or academic performance is commonly measured through examinations or continuous assessments but there is no general agreement on how it is best evaluated or which aspects are most important—procedural knowledge such as skills or declarative knowledge such as facts.

According to Narad and Abdullah (2016) academic performance is the knowledge gained which is assessed by marks by a teacher and/or educational goals set by students and teachers to be achieved over a specific period of time. They added that these goals are measured by using continuous assessment or examinations results. Annie, Howard and Midred (as cited in Arhad, Zaidi & Mahmood, 2015) also indicated that academic performance measures education outcome. They stressed that it shows and measures the extent to which an educational institution, teachers and students have achieved their educational goals. Similarly, Yusuf, Onifade and Bello (2016) opined that academic performance is a measurable and observable, behaviour of a student within a specific period. He added that it consists of scores obtained by a student in an assessment such as class exercise, class test, mid-semester, mock examination, and end of semester examination. Again academic performance of students is defined by a student's performance in an examination, tests, and in a course work. The academic performance involves factors such as the intellectual level, personality, motivation, skills, interests, study habits, self-esteem or the teacher-student relationship (Marti, 2003). An unsatisfactory academic performance is the one that is below the expected performance. Sometimes it can be related to teaching methods.

### **Music and Improvement of Academic Performance/ Behavior Difficulties**

Music is found to help student perform better in high-pressure situations, such as the bi-annual high-pressure event that is finals week. Studies have shown that music can help students transform from coal to diamonds, shining under pressure (Marketing Team 2019). Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons to listen to music during a study session is because music is proven to help improve academic performance. Basically, music helps your brain function! "Background music may enhance performance on academic tasks. One music researcher, find out that listening to music allowed test takers to complete more questions in the time allotted and get more answers right. More recent research suggests that whether or not music improves academic function depends on whether the music first improves a person's emotional state". If you want to improve academic performance while studying, the evidence now shows that you must first improve your emotional state by listening to music that you enjoy. Students listen to music to relieve tension and distract themselves from their behaviour difficulties. In other words, they use music to cope with behaviour difficulties. This has often been theorised but rarely operationalized. Miranda and Claes (2009) proposed a three-factor model of coping by music

that measures emotional management, problem-solving, and avoidance through listening to music. It revealed that adolescents' depression was linked to more emotional management and avoidance, but to less problem-solving through music listening. Thus, coping by music listening is complex as it involves both beneficial and deleterious patterns of coping strategies in behaviour difficulties.

According to Singh, (2017), Music helps in improving academic performances. Now, an experiment by a primary school in England has revealed that music can also help in improving academic performance among pupils. A Bradford primary school incorporated music in all aspects of teaching, providing up to 6 hours of music every week to every child and witnessed remarkable result in the students' performance. Academic performance is measured mostly by the percentage or grades achieved by a student in exam and never really by the knowledge actually accumulated by students. Hence, while a student may be scoring the required grade average under pressure, the actual amount of learning may be different (NDTV 2020). Music can be a solution where learning deficits are more apparent among students. Regular music classes can not only provide an outlet to a student's prospective creative abilities but also help them learn skills such as communication, working in a team, and help improving academic performance. Music can also work as a therapeutic channel for children who have a past of abuse or come from displaced communities and homes. According to Miranda & Gaudreau, (2011). the improvement of music in student investigates the influence of musical behaviours, emotions, cognitions, and motives can have on normative and positive development.

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that music seems to improve academic performance of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Music education has been decimated in schools around the globe, due to competition with academic performance and increasing lack of funding. Throughout the history, music has played a significant role in human life. It has been used to express and influence human thoughts, emotions and behaviour in various forms. Music has been used as a tool in treating human problems and bringing significant changes to human behaviour and academic performances.

### **Recommendation**

1. Ministry of education should introduce music in the school as a compulsory subject for the children to achieve a better academic performance.
2. Teachers should help and monitor their students regularly because children with emotional difficulties may refuse or unsuccessfully be able to utilize educational opportunities offered to them

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